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Alternative forms for bringing up and education of children in republic of Bulgaria

Alternatywne formy wychowania i edukacji dzieci w Bułgarii

Abstract: The social-economical changes that Republic of Bulgaria has undergone brought along a series of different reforms. One of the most significant reforms is the one conducted in the field of social care and protection of children and families. It took the Bulgarian society a lot of time to understand and carry out a number of significant changes in this area. An important step in the social changes is related to the implementation of the National Child Strategy 2008-2013, accepted by the 40-th Parliament on 31st of January 2008.

Streszczenie: Społeczno-ekonomiczne przemiany w Bułgarii przyniosły ze sobą szereg różnych reform. Jedną z najbardziej znaczących była reforma przeprowadzona w dziedzinie opieki społecznej i ochrony dzieci i rodzin. Zrozumienie i zaakceptowanie zmian przez bułgarskie społeczeństwo zajęło dużo czasu. Ważnym krokiem w przemianach społecznych jest realizacja w Narodowej Strategii Ochrony Dziecka na lata 2008-2013, przyjętej przez Parlament w dniu 31 stycznia 2008.

The social-economical changes that Republic of Bulgaria has undergone brought along a series of different reforms. One of the most significant reforms is the one conducted in the field of social care and protection of children and families. It took the Bulgarian society a lot of time to understand and carry out a number of significant changes in this area. An important step in the social changes is re-

lated to the implementation of the National Child Strategy 2008-2013, accepted by the 40-th Parliament on 31st of January 2008.

The National Child Strategy is consistent with the Bulgarian Constitution, laws and sub-law documents, research and strategic national documents like: The Common Memorandum on social inclusion of Republic of Bulgaria and the National report on strategies for social protection and social inclusion of Republic of Bulgaria 2006-2008; Operative program "Human resources development" (2007-2013); National strategy for demographic development of Republic of Bulgaria (2006-2020); National Health strategy \a project\; National action plan "Environment – health"; National integrated plan for implementation of the Children rights convention (2006-2009); National program for school education and pre-school education and preparation (2006-2015); Action plan for decreasing the number of drop-outs from school and children not attending school in compulsory age (2007-2009) \a project\; Strategy for educational integration of children and students from ethnical minorities (2004-2015); National plan for integration of children with special educational needs and/or chronic diseases in the system of common education; Framework for equal integration of Roma people in the Bulgarian society; National program for integration of refugees in Bulgaria [National Child strategy, 2008].

The actions and measures in the operative aims of the National child strategy are directly linked with the family background. They include such steps as: the necessity to provide the child right to live with his\hers parents; to respect the responsibilities, rights and the obligations of parents; to provide the child right to maintain contact with his parents during a temporary separation; to give necessary help of the parents for the effective realization of their parental functions.

The insurance of the child right to live with his\hers own parents is one of the leading priorities of the child care reform which started at Bulgaria with the acceptance of Child protection law. During the last years the state trough it's competent bodies (Child protection Departments, Municipalities and different Centers, NGOs) provide a range of measures for support of parents. This support includes social, financial, psychological help, including temporary care for the children in order to prevent its abandonment. Specific mechanisms for parents support has been develop that reflect the changes in the form and organization of the family life in Bulgaria, as well as the increasing mobility of the family members [by: National Child Strategy 2008].

According to the proclaimed priorities in the National Child Strategy the state actions are aimed at:

- *Taking measures for supporting the good and responsible parenthood*, which include: to popularize different forms, methods and services for family planning and unwanted pregnancy prevention; to offer services and forms for support during the pregnancy and the delivery of the baby; to offer services and forms for developing of skills for taking care and bringing up of the child according his\her age; to develop and implement in practice standards for early child development; to offer services for overcoming family crisis; to offer measures for irresponsible parenthood prevention and sanctioning;
- *Taking measures for supporting the parents when there is a risk for child abandonment* – actions for child abandonment prevention; development of professional skills of social workers for early detection of child abandonment risk signs and taking actions for protection;
- *Offering of social services within the community for children and family support according the community needs*;
- *Developing a network of forms for parent support*, which network to accompany the social services – education and training of parents, family consulting , special psychological consulting and others;
- *Providing additional guaranties for establishing the child origin* despite of the form of family \with or without matrimony\ including through participation of the child in the legal actions for establishing the arguing his\her origin;
- *Providing different and accessible services for parents*, to facilitate the personal contact between child and parents when there is a divorce or separation in the family through: stimulating of the development of services for parent skills; family mediation; family consultation and therapy; centers for meeting with children; supporting family agreements, developing of family law concerning child care after a divorce or separation;
- *Implementing a legal opportunity for giving an authority for legal actions and defending child rights* to persons that are not parents or adopters, but who have legal rights to take care for the child;
- *Providing a legal support, a living standard and social support through*: providing living standard according to the needs for physical, mental, emotional and social development of the child; creating

conditions for joining the professional and personal life of parents and labor realization of women [by: National Child Strategy 2008].

The development of social protection of children and families in our country aims at finding a proper balance between parenthood and professional realization of parents. The development of social policy in Bulgaria is looking also at finding adequate methods for stimulating of parenthood. It is looking at the necessity of giving credit to both parents for the up bringing of children as well as giving the woman protection of her reproductive functions and support for her professional career. The realization of this social policy is directly connected with the increased access of families to quality day care for their children, consistent with parents' needs and children necessities. Development of network of day care institutions is mainly a responsibility of municipality authorities, which are stimulated through different state policies and effective cooperation with social responsible employers [by: National Child Strategy 2008].

According the strategic programs, the action plans for their realization and the last changes in the Codex for social security, the Child protection law and other normative documents special meaning is given to the development of alternative cares for children and families. Government efforts and local authorities actions are aimed at creating conditions for up-bringing the children in family circle, decreasing the number of children in special institutions and creating mechanisms and systems that will guarantee quality services and cares for children, which are temporary separated from their families.

According the present law, there are two main forms for protection of children without parents: **Special institutions** (Homes for medical-social cares, Homes for children, deprived of family care, homes for children with physical injuries, homes for children with mental disabilities) and the so called **Community-based social services**, also called **alternative forms for up-bringing and education of children deprived of family care** (family center, center for temporary accommodation, crisis center, transition house, protected house, observed house, children asylum).

Where and how the alternative forms for care and education for children, deprived of family care take place?

The alternative forms for care for children without parents are realized at special institutions, resident type of institutions, foster families.

Institutional forms for care and education for children without family

These types of forms take place in Homes for medical-social cares, Homes for children, deprived of family care, homes for children with physical injuries, homes for children with mental disabilities. All of the above set their functions on the base of specific laws, considering the European standards. These documents are Law for social support and it's regulation, Child protection law and it's regulation, Law for health institutions and others.

The accommodation of children in different type of homes is based on a court decision. Till the court gives its decision the "Social support" Department in the municipality where the child lives is making the so called "Temporary accommodation". The requirement before court for the accommodation of the child is made by the same department, the district attorney or the parent himself. Each special institution for children has its own institutional project. This project is consistent with children needs and necessities, with the criteria and standards for social services for children, set in a special Instruction on national level.

The institutional project contains the main objective of the institution and the specific aims that should be achieved toward children. It describes the services the institution provides inside the home as well as any additional social service that the Home provides besides its main functions. The project also must contain the number, the qualifications and the experience of the staff, the organizational structure of the Home, its capacity, the material base (sleeping places, service premises, places for study, relax and playing).

The institutional projects of the HHomes for children with physical injuries and Homes for children with mental disabilities. These Centers offer a lot of different services – speech recreation and correction consultation, psych-social consultations, recreation healing excursions, different sensor procedures, music therapy and others.

The social services for children deprived of family care in special institutions have existed in Bulgaria since 1877. The development of the institutional care has several different stages:

I stage – 1878-1888 till 1944 – the child care is given to charity foundations mainly. There is no central-oriented system for so-

cially deprived children. First big Homes for children are created.

II stage – 1947-2000 – the children care have been set to strict centralization. Everything about them has been under the national law and regulations. The state took the role of services provider.

III stage – 2000 – till now – From centralization to decentralization. Since the Child protection law the start of a significant reform of the child protection and care system has been given. This is a period in which, although slow and with nonsystematic methods, child protection policy is transforming toward decentralization and the community initiative is strengthening for searching effective solutions for child protection (Kriviradeva).

The institutional form for child care originated in a very difficult for Bulgaria period – economically and socially. This is a period in which Bulgaria is forced to participate in several wars. The social-economical life at our country quite logically leads to creation of big buildings for large numbers of children. This is a period in which there are a lot of orphans, half-orphans and socially weak families which leads to the necessity of a quick and adequate protection for the children.

Despite the policy for deinstitutionalization, started at year 2000, the percentage of children in special institutions is still large, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Types and number special institutions in Bulgaria¹

Видове и брой интернатни институции в Р. България

| | TYPE OF INSTITUTION | NUMBER | CHILDREN NUMBER |
|---|--|--------|-----------------|
| 1 | HOMES FOR MEDICAL-SOCIAL CARE FOR CHILDREN 0-3 YEARS | 32 | 2421 |
| 2 | HOMES FOR CARE AND EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN, DEPRIVED OF FAMILY CARE - 3 до 18 YEARS | 80 | 3770 |
| 3 | HOMES FOR CHILDREN WITH PHYSICAL AND MENTAL DIABILITIES | 24 + 1 | 1386 |
| | TOTAL | 137 | 7 587 |

¹ <http://www.nsi.bg>- data valid - 2010

One of the specific steps at the deinstitutionalization² policy is the National strategy "Vision for children deinstitutionalization", accepted at the end of 2009. The creation of this political document is absolutely consistent with the Guidance for alternative child care of the United Nations Committee for children rights and approved by the General assembly. This National strategy has been publicly discussed with 23 NGOs and UNICEF. In order the Deinstitutionalization to be effectively implemented the philosophy of child care should be changed and should be aimed at child abandonment prevention and early family support.

One of the most important moments at the National deinstitutionalization strategy acceptance is providing particular meanings for its implementation. It describes the specific mechanisms for financing the action plan till 2013 which gives us a foundation for believing that the reform in this field that has already started will be carry out to an end.

Alternative forms for children care and education from resident type

These forms are basically a form of social services that should be able to provide meanings for satisfying everyday needs of a limited number of persons (not more than 15). They should give and opportunity to live in an environment close to family background. Social services for children from resident type are:

- *Center for accommodation (family type)* – this is a complex of social services that are provided in a setting similar to family setting for small number of persons.
- *Center for temporary accommodation* – Complex of social services for homeless persons for satisfying their everyday needs for not longer than 3 months for a year.
- *Crisis center* – Complex of social services for people, who has suffered from violence, people traffic or other forms of exploitation. The services are provided for period no longer that 6 months and are aimed at giving individual support, satisfying everyday needs,

² Deinstitutionalization process is a process of exchanging the institutional child care with care as close to family as possible. It suggests to provide different social services that are based in the community as well as prevention of child abandonment.

legal consulting or social-psychological help, including immediate intervention through mobile groups.

- *Transition house* – form of social service where people are leading independent lives supported by professionals. The objective is to support and make the transition between special institution and independent life easier.
- *Protected house* - form of social service where people are leading independent lives supported by professionals.
- *Observed house*– form of social services that gives support and consultations to people that have just turned 18 years and are leaving the special institutions, transition or protected house.
- *Asylum for children* – complex of social services for no longer than 3 months for homeless people when there is a urging necessity of satisfying their main needs for shelter, food, health care, hygiene, social, psychological and legal consulting.

During the last years a priority at the alternative child care is the adoption and foster care. While the adoption has its traditions in our country, foster care is a comparatively new form for child care. During the 40s of 20th century foster care is discussed in Bulgaria as a model for child care. At our country at this time the main alternative child care form is the adoption, which was held during court. The children without parents were taken care by the large family – grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins. This form of taking care for children by the large family circle is a tradition in Bulgaria, but during the last years the Bulgarian governments put a lot of efforts to establish foster care as an alternative form.

According to the duration of the accommodation of the child in the foster family this type of care can be:

- *Short-term* – while the child real parents decide their problems and are able to take care for him/her;
- *Long-term* – when the child will grow up as a part of the foster parents own family;
- *Emergency* – for a child in a crisis situation when his/hers life or health is in danger;
- *Replacing care* – when the real parents should be supported and the foster family takes care for the child during weekends and holidays.

Foster parents can be volunteers that want to help a child in trouble, or professional foster parents. The professional foster parents

are carefully selected and sign a contract with "Social support" department before any child to be accommodated in their house. If the foster family consists of a husband and wife, only one of them signs the contract.

The accommodation and up-bringing of a child in a foster family has as an aim to provide the child essential right to grow up and develop his/herself in a family surrounding. Foster care has the goal to provide for a period of time safe and secure family environment for the child, which environment to contribute to his/hers psychical, emotional and psychological development. Foster care is a meaning to prevent child institutionalization and gives the real parents support in a difficult time. It is a common situation when a child is placed in a foster home in order to be supported for future independent life through acquiring social skills.

The child accommodation in a foster family is a temporary measure. Child care in a foster family can satisfy the child needs only for a certain period of time, but cannot give a constant family environment like the biological family or adopters. A constant communication between the child and his/hers real parents during foster family accommodation is an absolute necessity. Foster care is slowly gaining popularity in our country. This statement is supported with the data from the Social support agency. This data shows that for the first 3 months of 2010 34 foster families have been approved in Bulgaria. These 34 families consist of 8 volunteers and 26 professional foster families. The total of children accommodated in foster families for the first six months of 2010 is 56 (4 in volunteers foster families and 52 in professional foster families (www.asp.government.bg/ASP_Client/)).³

In our country the most common measure for child protection when the child cannot live with his/hers parents is the accommodation in the close family circle. This measure is now and maybe in future the most used⁴. This fact is based on the traditions that we have preserved for support and help from the large family circle in child up-

³ For comparison: children in foster families, (2000 – 0; 2001-1; 2002 – 9; 2003 – 5; 2004 – 29; 2005 – 48; 2006 – 75; 2007 – 135. (National statistic 2007 www.sacp.government.bg)

⁴ If in **2000**. The number of children accommodated with families of near relations was **878**, in **2004**. It grows to **1996**, in **2005** – to **4026** children, in **2006**. there are **5536** children and the tendency for increasing this number is still in high levels. (www.sacp.government.bg)

bringing. This measure for protection together with a suitable public support has a priority before the foster family accommodation since it gives the child a better opportunities for keeping his/hers identity and close contacts with the biological family.

One of the best social commercials is the one related to the foster family campaign. There are a lot of big posters all over the country that state that all the children need a family and everyone who wishes can become a foster parent. This commercial also has a TV version. This large publicity clearly shows that foster family approbation is a priority of the government.

According to the stated policies, described in the National Child strategy 2008-2018 the Bulgarian government is willing to create quality alternative forms for child care through:

- Improving the quality of services “accommodation with related family” and volunteer foster care;
- Giving priority of child accommodation with related family or foster family in front of institution accommodation;
- Developing services for family support, family relations support if the child is placed at such a family;
- Developing the capacity of state bodies and NGO sector for raising the quality of the social services;
- Enlarging the circle of social services providers especially the “foster care” service (National Child strategy)

Adoption as an alternative child care form needs a constant précising and adapting to the dynamic changes of social life. According to this all Bulgarian governments are trying to perfect the adoption procedure, placing the child interest in its center. One of the main goals of the adoption is to ensure a priority of adoption of Bulgarian children by Bulgarian citizens and the adoption by foreigners to be permitted only in cases when there are no Bulgarian families that are willing or suitable to adopt the particular child. A significant moment during the adoption is to preserve the opportunity to keep the child identity in ethnical, cultural and religious aspect. In this respect the social services that provide an obligatory preparation for the future adopters should be further developed. The candidate adopters and the children need good and quality social-psychological support and this creates the necessity to keep the development of this support further on. One of the most significant changes to be conducted in our country is the change in the present laws concerning the adoption.

This change is related to the necessity to facilitate the children access to adoption if that is consistent with their interest. The change is also related to the perfection of the adoption procedure by keeping the balance between the necessities of a thorough research and choice of the most suitable family and the will to provide the child with a family as soon as possible. Last, but not least it is important to develop the capacity of the government bodies that are responsible for the adoption procedure.

From all of the above we can make the conclusion that the future of social services for children and families is closely connected with the community-based services and the alternative family care. The present special institutions are about to be closed or restructured. One of the main goals of the social services reform in our country is to decrease the number of children accommodated in special institutions and to create an optimal conditions for their similarity to the family environment. In order this main goal to be achieved the development of the alternative child care forms should be continued and the range of the social services enlarged according to the clients needs.

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